



Appreciative Inquiry of Relationships

Strengths

 Exercise

 60 min

 Client

 No

Appreciative Inquiry (AI) is about searching for the best in people, their organizations, and the relevant world around them. Through facilitating a respectful inquiry into a topic of interest, AI aims to identify solutions that already exist and are working in a human system and reflect and amplify those aspects to move the system in positive directions (Cooperrider & Whitney, 2001). In other words, it involves an examination of what gives 'life' to a living system when it is functioning at its best. AI represents a paradigm shift in the world of sustainable development in that it adopts a strengths-based change approach as opposed to a deficit-based change approach. A similar paradigm shift is observed in the world of psychology; in traditional psychology, the focus is on correcting weaknesses, whereas in positive psychology, the focus is on building strengths.

AI involves sharing stories of success, and this process opens people up to their past and present capabilities, such as achievements, unrealized potentials, strengths, values, motivations, hopes, dreams, innovations, traditions, and visions of values and possible futures. Within this context, people listen to one another, share information, generate meaningful discussions, and ultimately produce new knowledge.

AI consists of four key stages: Discovery, Dream, Design, and Destiny. The completion of these four stages results in transformational change, sourced from the collaborative inquiry with participants (Cram, 2010). This tool is designed to help clients examine important personal relationships using the 4-dimensional process: to discover what is working well in the relationship; to investigate the client's hopes and dreams for the relationship in the future; to design plans to realize part of all of the hopes and dreams; to implement those plans and actions.



Author

This tool was adapted from an exercise created by Jason MacKenzie by Lucinda Poole (PsyD).



Goal

The goal of the tool is for clients to identify positivity in a current important relationship and—with awareness—learn to be in this relationship with appreciative intent.



Advice

- The emphasis in AI is on imagination and innovation rather than intervention. In this way, instead of focusing on negativity, criticism, and diagnosis, the focus is on the discovery, dream, and design. Thus, ensure that your language and the tone of the session are encouraging, optimistic, and inspirational.
- This exercise could be adapted for use with pairs, depending on your client's preference. If he or she would like the other person in the identified close relationship to participate, ensure that you, the therapist, treat both parties equally and objectively during the exercise.



References

- Cooperrider, D. L., & Whitney, D. (2001). A positive revolution in change: Appreciative inquiry. *Public administration and public policy*, 87, 611-630.
- Cram, F. (2010). Appreciative inquiry. *Mai Review*, 3, 1-13.



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Instructions

In this exercise, we will examine one of your close relationships to help it flourish. This could be your relationship with your partner, parent, sibling, or friend. The idea with the exercise is to dive deep into what works in this relationship; however, the relationship you choose does not need to be one that is currently thriving. In fact, this exercise can be particularly helpful for exploring those problematic relationships in our lives.

Step 1: Identify an important relationship

First, think about a personal relationship on which you would like to work today. Describe the current state of this relationship, including how you feel toward the other person and the relationship in general.

Step 2: Discover

2a. Celebration

Within important relationships, each person makes meaningful and purposeful contributions that should be celebrated and acknowledged. With regards to your chosen relationship, think about a moment or experience that is worth celebrating and discuss the following:



What was it about this moment that made it worth celebrating?

What qualities did you bring to this moment?

What qualities did the other person bring to this moment?

2b. Maintenance

Maintaining an important relationship is a collaborative effort.

What do you value most about yourself that contributes to the healthy development of this relationship? In other words, what is your greatest strength in this relationship?



What do you value most about the other person that contributes to the healthy development of the relationship?

Describe a time when you worked well together to come to a solution in a way that made you both feel respected.

Step 3: Dream

By thinking about and visualizing an ideal future, you can begin to make positive changes to help achieve this future. For the next few minutes, close your eyes and visualize your ideal relationship. How would you like your relationship to be? What would you like to see more of in your relationship that would create a greater feeling of harmony and peace? What words could the other person use to describe to you that would make you feel proud? What hopes and dreams do you have for this relationship?

Describe what you visualized.



Step 4: Design

Now let's look at what you can do to move the relationship closer to your newly envisioned ideal.

What concrete steps could you (as an individual) take to move towards your ideal future relationship? What strengths could you use to help realize your hopes and dreams?

What concrete steps could you take together with the other person to help you realize your hopes and dreams for the future?

When you look back on your relationship with each other 10 years from now, what actions and behaviors would give you the greatest sense of pride, meaning, and fulfillment?

Step 5: Destiny

When initiating any type of change in life, it can be useful to set an intention and commit to the change process. Thus, in the space below, clearly outline what you intend to do to help your identified relationship flourish and why. The 'why' part of your intention will be helpful when following through with your identified changes becomes challenging. When thinking about the 'why,' consider three things: what kind of person you want to be in this life, how you want to act towards yourself and other people, and why this relationship is important to you.



I intend to:

because:

Signed:

Date: